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CONSIDERATIONS

UPON HOW FAR THE PRESENT

WINTER AND SUMMER THEATRES

CAN BE AFFECTED BY THE

APPLICATION TO PARLIAMENT

FOR AN ACT TO ENABLE HIS MAJESTY TO

LICENSE,

As a PLAYHOUSE for the *Summer Season*,

THE

ROYALTY THEATRE,

IN

WELL-STREET,

IN THE LIBERTY OF THE

TOWER HAMLETS.

BRITISH MUSEUM

CONSIDERATIONS, &c.

THE Proprietor and Renters of this Theatre, ſupported by the declared wiſhes of upwards of ten thouſand inhabitants of its vicinity, have approached Parliament for the object ſtated in the title of this Caſe. To form a fair opinion of their claim, it ſhould be conſidered that the Royalty Theatre is above three miles diſtant from either of the winter theatres, and near four from Mr. Colman's, in the Haymarket: and that, for two or three miles farther eaſtward of the Royalty Theatre, there are extremely populous diſtricts and villages, the reſiants in which are deprived, by their diſtance, from almoſt ever participating in the drama's rational entertainment, Indeed, they may be ſaid

to

to be wholly without the means of innocent relaxations. The eſtabliſhment of well-regulated theatres in an immenſe metropolis is admitted to be one of the engines of a ſound policy; and the object of that policy is ſurely beſt promoted by placing them ſo apart, as with convenience to exhibit the picture of regular manners, to inculcate the leſſons of virtue, and debaſe the acts of vice.

Feeling thus of the mannered ſtage, the Eaſtern Public have aſked for one.

But ſtill private property was regarded in the prayer of their petition; and it will now be proved, that neither the Patent Theatres in Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden, nor even Mr. Colman's leſs permanent eſtabliſhment in the Haymarket, will receive the leaſt injury from a ſummer grant to the Royalty Theatre.

We will firſt take up the conſideration of the Patent Theatres: and perhaps the beſt mode of doing this will be, by laying open the correſpondence which paſſed between Mr. Steel (who is the proprietor of the Royalty Theatre), Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Harris.

Before the petitions were preſented to Parliament, Mr. Steel (under the advice of his friends) waited on Mr. Sheridan; and it is to a converſation, which then paſſed, that Mr. Steel alludes in the following letter, which was written and ſent after the petitions were received by the Houſe of Commons, and referred to a Committee.

Conduit Street, Hanover Square, March 8, 1794.

SIR,

The petitions for the Royalty Theatre were on Tueſday laſt received by the Houſe of Commons, and referred to a committee. Entruſted as I am to obtain, if poſſible, the wiſhes of the public in that vicinity, and to act for the body of Renters, I truſt you will think theſe duties would be a ſufficient apology for again urging a plea in favour of that Theatre, if I even had not in myſelf a great intereſt at ſtake.

You have very candidly told me, that oppoſition to our prayer is *ſelf-defence* in you, becauſe it is the ſettled opinion of yourſelf and others intereſted in the two winter Theatres, that, if once your monopoly is broken through, your property would ſink in value at leaſt one-third.

Give me leave here to repeat, that we aſk only for four ſummer months, and thoſe are the months in

which Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden are unemployed. Is it not therefore evident that the Royalty Theatre would abſtain from an invaſion of that monopoly with the moſt diſtant reſerve? I forbear to argue at length upon the ſubject: your abilities can with greater facility, and more advantageouſly to me, anticipate every favourable obſervation: I will rather endeavour to gueſs at real motives, and apply myſelf to them.

If your oppoſition ſhould proceed not from a conviction that the grant of a mere ſummer ſeaſon would affect the winter Theatres, but from a ſurmiſe that our whole wiſh is not revealed, and that we may hereafter apply for a Winter Theatre, give me leave to remove this ſource of alarm. I will enter into an engagement, for myſelf and my aſſigns, in any form, and under any penalty, that the Royalty Theatre ſhall never be ſo employed.

I wiſh to be underſtood as willing to bind myſelf to this in the moſt unevaſive manner.

But, if no conceſſions on the part of the Proprietary in Well-Street will be accepted by the Patentees of the Winter Theatres, and an oppoſition, apparently without reaſon, be reſolved on; ſuch intereſt as I, an obſcure individual, can make, I muſt; I muſt addreſs myſelf to the impartial and unconnected members of the Houſe of Commons; and lay the grounds of our petition before the public. It is an unpleaſant method, and it is an expenſive one; but, being

the unwilling proprietor of the Royalty Theatre, I muſt endeavour to ſecure my property by all honorable means.

I requeſt permiſſion to wait on you on Tueſday morning, to know your final determination; which, on re-conſideration, I am willing to hope, will be more facile to the wiſhes of the petitioners, than on the firſt bluſh of things it might have been formed.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your moſt obedient humble Servant,

D. STEEL.

R. B. Sheridan, Eſq. M. P. &c. &c.

To this letter Mr. Steel received no anſwer; and, after an unſucceſsful viſit at Mr. Sheridan's houſe, he ſent the following.

Conduit-ſtreet, Hanover-ſquare, 12 *March,* 1794.

SIR,

In conſequence of the intimation in my letter of the 8th inſt. I did myſelf the honor of calling on you yeſterday morning; but I had not the good fortune to find you at home.

I have received a letter from Mr. Harris, which negatives an agreement with my propoſitions, ſimilar to thoſe which I communicated to you. If I do not hear from you in the courſe of this day, I muſt reluctantly

reluctantly conclude, that you likewiſe are averſe from any accommodation whatever.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your moſt obedient humble Servant,
D. STEEL.

R. B. Sheridan, Eſq. M. P. &c. &c.

Mr. Steel to this received no anſwer.

Mr. Steel had likewiſe appriſed Mr. Harris, by letter, that the application to Parliament was only for a ſummer theatre. He, however, wrote again to Mr. Harris the following letter.

Conduit-ſtreet, Hanover-ſquare, March 8, 1794.

SIR,

I HAD the pleaſure of explaining to you, in a recent letter, the object of the petitions for the Royalty Theatre; and I did hope, that, when you found our utmoſt wiſhes extended to a ſummer ſeaſon, you would have thought that ſo diſtant a theatre at that ſeaſon of the year would not affect your property in Covent-Garden. But, as I have underſtood from MR. SHERIDAN, that you agree with him in the neceſſity of an oppoſition, I truſt you will excuſe me for reviving the ſubject, eſpecially when you are aware of the very great intereſt I have at ſtake.

I have offered that you and MR. SHERIDAN ſhould name the limitation of our ſummer ſeaſon, ſo as to be perfectly clear of your concerns. But,

as that offer could not be accepted, while you diſapproved of our application at all, I think it a duty which I owe to the petitioners explicitly to declare the period, during which a theatre is prayed for at the Eaſtern extremity of the metropolis. We aſk then, Sir, for four ſummer months; and thoſe are the months in which the winter theatres are unemployed. Hence we hope you will feel that the protection of your own intereſt will not dictate to oppoſe us.

I will, however, go yet further: I will enter into an engagement for myſelf and my aſſigns, in any form and under any penalty, that the Royalty Theatre ſhall never be employed otherwiſe than as a mere ſummer theatre for four months. And I wiſh to be underſtood as willing to bind myſelf to this in the moſt unequivocal manner, in order to prevent the poſſibility of any future application for a longer or different ſeaſon than that which is now declared.

I am the unwilling proprietor, Sir, of the Royalty Theatre; I muſt endeavour to ſecure that property by all honourable means: If, therefore, no conceſſion on the part of the proprietary in Well Street, will be accepted by the patentees of the winter theatres, and an oppoſition, apparently without reaſon, be reſolved on, ſuch intereſt as I, an obſcure individual can make, I muſt; I muſt addreſs myſelf to the impartial and unconnected members of the Houſe of Commons, and lay the grounds of our petition before the public. This is a method, unpleaſant and expenſive; but it will be then unavoidable.

I requeſt

I requeſt permiſſion to wait on you on Tueſday morning, to know your final determination; which I hope will, on reconſideration, coincide with the wiſhes of the petitioners.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your moſt obedient

humble Servant,

D. STEEL.

T. Harris, Eſq.

To which, on the 11th, Mr. Steel received the following anſwer.

Cov. Gard. Theatre, March 10, 1794.

SIR,

In reply to your favour of the 8th inſtant, I am deſir'd by the Proprietors, Mortgagees, Renters, and others concern'd in this Theatre, to acquaint you, that they have unanimouſly reſolv'd, that, in order to prevent the certain ruin of this property, they are under the neceſſity of oppoſing, to the utmoſt of their power, the eſtabliſhment of any more Theatres in the City's of London and of Weſtminſter.

I am, Sir,

Your very obedient Servant,

TH. HARRIS.

N. B. In conſequence of the above reſolution, I ſhall not expect the honour of ſeeing you to-morrow.

The petitioners now with confidence aſk, why are the Patent Theatres to be *totally ruined*, if the Royalty Theatre be open, *while they are ſhut?* They with equal confidence aſk, how are they to be *in the leaſt injured?* Why have not this expected ruin and injury been accompliſhed by the ſummer exiſtence of Mr. Colman's theatre ſince the year 1766? Or, why muſt one more ſummer theatre infallibly produce this direful ruin and combuſtion? Surely the fears of Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Harris are not to be received, as the *poſtulates* of mathematics, without proof? And it is very difficult to trace the ſmalleſt *real ground* for theſe fears.

Something indeed might have remained, whereon to have raiſed this fabric of timidity, if Mr. Steel had not offered, unequivocally to guarantee, that the ſummer ſeaſon of four months ſhould never be extended, or departed from; and this Mr. Steel had it fully in his power to do, for the trifling term of *two hundred and ninety-one years*, which is the remainder of his term in the Royalty Theatre.

It ſeems, therefore, quite clear, that *direct-*

not be injured. How then might this happen *collaterally?* It was hinted to Mr. Steel by Mr. Sheridan, that he by no means liked to encourage the ſpeculation of firſt building theatres, and then ſeeking for an authority under which they might be employed; and he inſtanced the recent rebuilding of the Pantheon in a complete theatric ſhape, although there exiſted no authority for opening it; and that, if this application were ſucceſsful, it might give hopes to the Pantheon proprietary to attempt the ſame.

To this mode of reaſoning, it may be replied, that if fifty *ſummer* theatres were licenſed, they could not poſſibly affect the *winter* ones: but that, when an application is made for a third theatre in the winter, then will be the proper time for the winter proprietors to urge their beſt arguments, and uſe their beſt influence. When a *real competitor* is likely to ariſe, they would be as unjuſt to themſelves not to oppoſe, as they ſeem now to be without excuſe for perſiſting in their hoſtility. To guard againſt any collateral injury, by a future application for a Winter Theatre, Mr. Steel made the offer contained

in his letters of the 8th of March: and thus, ſurely, whether *directly* or *collaterally* conſidered, *the oppoſition of the Winter Patentees remains without excuſe.*

We will now conſider the ſuppoſed injury to Mr. Colman.

It ſhould be underſtood, that, in the year 1738, four theatres exiſted; Drury-lane, Covent-garden, the little Theatre in the Hay-market, and that of Mr. Giffard, in Goodman's-fields. The act of 10th Geo. II. left every theatre but Drury-lane and Covent-garden, without an authority for their performances: and, therefore, thoſe of Goodman's-fields and the Hay-market, were neceſſarily ſhut. In the year 1766, however, the little Theatre in the Haymarket was permitted to proceed, under a patent for the life of the late Mr. Foote. With him died that patent, and Mr. Colman's property now depends upon the countenance of the Lord Chamberlain of his Majeſty's houſehold.

Mr. Colman's Theatre is, therefore, merely permiſſive, not permanent; which, however, having ſo long been thought of

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convenience to the weſtern part of the town in the ſummer ſeaſon, ought not, in fairneſs, to be prejudiced by any other eſtabliſhments.

Let it be remembered, that Mr. Colman's property is nearly four miles diſtant from the Royalty Theatre; and that it is a houſe of very ſmall dimenſions.

When it is ſtated that Wapping, Limehouſe, Shadwell, Poplar, Blackwall, Mile-end, Stepney, Bow, Hackney, Stratford, are the places whence the Royalty Theatre muſt expect to collect its conſtant audiences, what rational fears can be entertained of its interference with Mr. Colman's? The city of Weſtminſter is alone fully adequate to the ſupport of one ſmall theatre; which is, in return, only ſufficiently capacious for Weſtminſter and its ſuburbs. The weſtern extreme will no more come down to the Royalty Theatre, than the eaſtern extreme go *five*, *ſix*, and *ſeven* miles to Mr. Colman's. But, if they did, where would Mr. Colman ſeat them? Thoſe whom affection to their Sovereign have occaſionally drawn from the extremes of London to the Haymarket, have returned

turned in crowds, disappointed and unaccommodated,

When it is thus proved, that the interests of Drury-lane and Covent-garden could not, and that those of the Haymarket, in all likelihood and fair conclusion, would not, be affected by a summer grant to the Royalty Theatre, the question again returns to, and rests wholly upon, the policy of the measure; would it, or would it not be expedient to place a theatre at the eastern extreme of the city of London, to be opened for four months in the summer? The present age is too enlightened, and the utility of well-regulated theatres is too well understood, to render a laborious argument upon this point necessary.

The preceding facts and conclusions are most respectfully submitted to the consideration of the Parliament of Great Britain.

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